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THE PRIEST AND PAN

BY MARY-LAPSLEY CAUGHEY

(The scene is a quiet valley, Arcadian and softly green. A grey haze hangs over it, save where in the distance mountains appear, shining with a far-off light. Pan is singing. A Priest stands listening to him.)

PAN

O Youth! Youth! Youth! Deliciousness that knows
Nothing of weariness, which like a rose
Is sweet and vivid, living happily.
O Youth! Youth! Youth! What is eternity?

THE PRIEST

Listen, O Pan. 'Tis time to stop your play.
Already evening closes on bright day
And you have done no deed of grace, no work
Such as the Father wills. . . .

PAN

See, where there lurk
In these soft hours the memories of love.
The earth, the air, the trees that wave above
My head, whisper of languor, ease and rest,
Of a white nymph who flees with sun-warmed breast.

THE PRIEST (*chanting*)

Lord, have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep Thy law.

PAN (*singing uneasily*)

O Mountains, shining, silver-fair,
Would my goat-hoofs could lead me where
You glitter. Would that I might be
High-seated on you, or in glee
Could gallop over your blue slopes,
Finding within your woods strange hopes,
New flowers and rare, fantastic sights,
Other sweet nymphs, and odd delights.

THE PRIEST

*Dominus vobiscum,
Et cum spiritu tuo,
Per omnia sæcula sæculorum.*

PAN (*stopping his song*)

What song is that? I do not like its sound.

THE PRIEST

Pan, child of God, listen while I propound
The will of God, how He would save mankind.
He would not let you stray in darkness, blind
To His Divinity—

PAN (*breaking in*)

Divinity! That is the Youth in me.
Ah, I am young and I am glad to be
Free of the hills and meadows, to touch flowers,
To live in idleness for endless hours.
Divinity is Youth, Song, gracious Ease;
A perfect trinity these three, and these
I worship, worship laughingly,
Singing
Divinity, Youth, Ease—Divinity!

THE PRIEST

Stop, Pan! O Pan, Pan, you have played too long.

PAN

You say that when you hear my lovely song?

THE PRIEST

Songs do not matter. It is prayers that count,
Prayers to the Father on His holy mount.

PAN (*singing*)

What is Song that it should be
Living till eternity?
After we poor singers die,
Why should it have wings to fly?
Song is such a little thing;
Words which have a lovely ring;
Tiny phrases which the mind
Fashions carefully to bind
Beauty for an instant. So,
Song's a thing which will not grow
Old or die. Song still lives on
After we who sing are gone.

THE PRIEST

If in your songs you praise the God Who made
You after His own image, gave you aid

To rise above your weakness and to be,
With grace, immortal to eternity . . .

PAN

Immortal? Beauty, Beauty alone is so.
All else, alas, must quickly fade. And, lo!
Even that gracious Beauty which the soft flesh wears
Withers and faints too soon. The rose that bears
Its wide-spread crimson crown most proudly, dies.
And mortal man who deems himself so wise?
His lovely body dies like that bright flower.
Only the Beauty of his dreams has power
To outlive him in some vicarious way;
In poem, or picture, stately masque or play,
Immortal. Beauty, Beauty alone is so.

THE PRIEST

Be still! Be still! O Pan, you do not know
What you are saying. Hear, and sing of God.

PAN

Beauty is Youth, and Youth is God.

THE PRIEST

No, no! Attend.

“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.”

(Pan sits silent, overwhelmed by the flow of words.)

Know then, that through Christ's love alone is life, that He is the Saviour of this world. Without Him the world will live in darkness, damned to hell-fire, if it does not accept His saving grace.

(Pan crouches as if to make off. The Priest puts out a restraining hand and touches him.)

PAN *(crying out)*

Aie, aie! Lord Christ whom this man bids me seek,
Hear me, I pray you, hear me when I speak!
Take . . . take this horror from my sight!
Take him away. . . . Great is your might.
I cannot understand his talk of you.
I only pipe because the sky is blue
And I am happy . . . I do not know
How to address you, Christ.

(He struggles vainly to escape the Priest)

Aie, let me go!

Call off your servant, Christ, who are his King.

Christ, do you hear? I only want to sing!

(The sky goes black; a thunder clap is heard. When it is light again, the Priest is alone; the mist has cleared.)

THE PRIEST

Ah, what a nightmare! What a hideous thing!

I dreamed I heard the pagan god, Pan, sing.

ACIDPOINT

BY JOSEPH AUSLANDER

Such is the pure sharp cutting of the air
To crying beauty that the seagulls know;
And such the white teeth and rebellious hair
Of every undertow.

Lovely as steel, lonelier than all pride,
Hard, glittering, trenchant, bitterly wonderful—
Such is the laughter of each ebbing tide,
The mewing of each gull.